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ABSTRACT

Applicable to kindergarten through grade 12, the individualized Language Arts composition program is based upon actual student experiences. Once student writing samples have been plotted on a diagnostic grid, the program's manual provides teachers with specific methods for meeting students' needs. Uniting cognitive, affective, and creative learning, Individualized Language Arts instruction moves from basic sentence construction, through paragraphing, to extended products. In sentence synthesis, students create and expand sentences from their own vocabulary. Paragraph expansion teaches them to expand their kernel sentences into paragraphs by answering "when," "where," "why," "what," or "how." Framed paragraph exercises, in which students fill in blanks to complete a paragraph, help students make the transition from sentence synthesis to paragraph writing. A column of questions followed by a column of answers and a column of details provides the format for composition outlining. Advanced composition outlining, used for expository writing, employs a similar format. Expansion by modification, expansion by duplication, slotting, movability, and embedding are techniques used to improve and polish compositions. (JL)

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INDIVIDUALIZED LANGUAGE ARTS

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INDIVIDUALIZED LANGUAGE ARTS

One of the curricular questions that is currently under scrutiny by English teachers and teachers in general is how to improve students' composition. The fact that some of our nation's high-school graduates are entering the job market with few writing skills has aggravated this inquiry. In looking at the problem, a group of teachers and administrators in Weehawken, New Jersey set out to find a logical and workable method for composition instruction. So was born the Individualized Language Arts: Diagnosis, Prescription and Evaluation. The New Jersey program is aimed at developing writing competencies in students through prescribed instructional methods which are usable at various grade levels.

Individualized Language Arts is a composition program that is applicable to grades K through twelve and has even been used in remedial college work. The program moves in a total communication spiral to unite oral and written language with thinking skills and, thus, stimulate students' composition development. Set in the actual experiences of students, activities start with a discussion of an experience common to all students and proceed to individualized written compositions. At no time is the student left to drift and wonder just what is expected.

There is a succinct set of techniques that guide and encourage young writers to enjoy composition while having their abilities to produce well-written products improved by prescribed instruction.

Writing samples are taken early in the school year, and from these samples students' needs are detected. The areas of need, located in the samples, are plotted on a diagnostic grid sheet that lists possible problems students may experience in composition work. Techniques to remediate problem areas are presented in the manual for the program, thereby providing teachers with specific methods to use in helping students overcome problems or weaknesses in writing. By consulting the manual and comparing it to the diagnostic grid, teachers can locate the instructional methods that will aid students in improving their writing.

The methods, which proceed from group composition to individual work, stress a logical flow of thought and challenge higher level thinking. Besides developing cognitive abilities, instruction is also directed to turn students on to composition, utilize their own language, and develop the process of discovery and enjoyment of writing. Teaching begins with oral demonstrations of what is to be included in the writing activities; such activities then become part of the classroom on a regular basis. Checklists are generated to remind students of what to look for before they write, as they write, and after they write.

Accompanied by a constant on-going evaluation, the methodology prescribes specific techniques to be used in evaluating the students' work when it is compared to the items on the check-lists.

The Individualized Language Arts' philosophy contends that writing should be an expression of joy and wonderment, provide an outlet for negative emotions, and be used as a communication tool with others. Communications take the form of expressions of friendliness, statements of opinion, presentations of information, and descriptions of events or places. Because of this philosophy, the program unites cognitive, affective, and creative learning.

Strategies for Teaching the Basic Sentence

The Individualized Language Arts program moves from basic sentence construction, through paragraphing, and into expanded products. Starting with sentence synthesis and proceeding to paragraph development, the program provides students with developmental models for composition.

Sentence synthesis is one of the first basic steps that is involved in the writing process. Sentences are produced by using the students' spelling, reading, or speaking vocabulary. The students supply a number of basic words and are shown how to synthesize the words into sentences complete with subject and predicate. A variety of words are used depending upon the level of student development and the goals of the teacher.

Sentences are termed "kernel" and later can become topic sentences for paragraphs or examples for sentence expansion. Students are encouraged to develop a variety of sentences and to utilize their creative potential for imagination and visualization. While seeing the types of sentences that can be written, students become aware of the structure and organization and the various constructions. After the development of the basic kernel sentence, ideas for using these sentences as paragraph starters or topic sentences are introduced.

Paragraph expansion follows the synthesizing of sentences. This technique expands a kernel or topic sentence into a paragraph by adding additional sentences that answer the questions of "when," "where," "why," "what," or "how." Each paragraph developed will not answer all of these questions, but the logical flow of thought from the topic sentences to the paragraph summary is present. Supportive sentences are added to reinforce the concept of the topic sentence. This technique is first presented orally with an entire class, thereby supplying a model for individual work. After the writing of the first, or introductory, paragraph, each supportive sentence in that paragraph is paraphrased and used as a topic sentence for further writing. Additional paragraphs are developed individually by students, so that each is given an opportunity to use his or her creative thinking skills and writing abilities. Individual compositions are then read aloud for appraisal and proofreading. By using this

procedure, students are provided with instruction in the production of sentences, paragraphs, and extended works. After students have become familiar with the process or paragraph expansion, they proceed independently to employ it in creative, narrative, descriptive, and personal writing. The procedure also can be utilized in preparing reports in social studies, science, or any other content area.

Framed paragraphs are a crutch in mastering the process of moving from sentence synthesis to paragraph expansion. In framed paragraphs, the basic structure of the paragraph is provided along with a topic sentence. Students fill in allotted slots to complete the writing. An example of a framed paragraph, concerning George Washington, is an illustration of this technique.

"George Washington was a great leader. When the --- Washington ---. Later after ---, he --- --- ---. Washington was a --- --- and was asked to --- --- because --- --- ---."

In lower elementary grades, the allotted slots are used to reinforce reading, vocabulary, and spelling practice. The technique is applicable to various grade levels and in a variety of subjects; therefore, it is an excellent tool for testing in the content areas. After the students feel secure in paragraph construction, the use of framed paragraphs becomes minimal; and when the writers are able to produce their own work, the amount of

teacher direction is decreased and students proceed at their own individual pace and ability level. By moving from sentences to extended compositions, efforts are enriched, and confidence in personal writing ability is enhanced. Creativity is encouraged because the individuals write by manipulation of their own unique ideas and words.

Proofreading skills also are taught through Individualized Language Arts. Spelling and punctuation corrections are part of the checklists developed to ensure correct composition. A series of spelling correction strategies are presented by the program. One such strategy is to have students read their compositions backwards, sentence by sentence, for the purpose of locating any spelling errors that were by-passed in reading the composition for clarity and coherence.

Composition Outlining

After students have become comfortable with the development of sentences and paragraphs, a system of organization is needed to continue the growth of writing skills. Individualized Language Arts presents an outlining technique that is extremely useful. The outlining presented by the program focuses on Questions, Answers, and Details. Outlining is paced carefully to the maturity of the students, but it can be attempted with various forms of composition.

The easiest type of composition for writers of any grade level to outline is the chronological narrative--the "story."

The outlining procedure is started as a group activity and kept as such for as long as necessary. Later, students apply the process individually.

A list of questions is prepared as they relate to the purpose of a composition, and appropriate information is entered as answers to the questions. The details, which enrich the answers, are listed in the details column. An example of this technique describes a class trip.

Question	Answer	Details
Where we went	To the museum	At the college Near the stadium
Who went?	Our class	The class The teachers
What happened first?	We saw old cars	Model-T Antiques Old trucks
What happened next?	We saw farm displays	Wagons Tractors Animals

The outlines generally follow a chronological sequence. In the lower grades especially, where developing a sense of time sequence is an important Language Arts goal in itself, simply taking the sentences from the answers column in correct order develops a sequence activity for composition. From a class-developed outline, students produce their own individual compositions by using personal impressions and creative descriptian. Brainstorming of ideas and the use of words or phrases that a reader will be able to see, hear, feel, taste, smell, or sense

round out the composition. In the upper grades, students learn to streamline their compositions and avoid vague, too general, or judgmental answers. The outline is filled with words or phrases because it is only a tool for the finished products. There should be just enough words per column to allow students to recognize what is meant and allow for leniency in the individual development of compositions. Students soon recognize that the outline itself encourages the breaking of compositions into paragraphs. "What happened first," may be the theme of a paragraph, followed by another paragraph describing "What happened second." Particularly in the upper grades, students who have developed some proficiency in writing can be encouraged to break away from a strict chronological approach. In the composition about a class trip, the first paragraph might explain the last details of the trip, and the rest of the composition can be presented in flash-back form.

Outlining of descriptive writing generally follows in a natural sequence the use of the narrative style. Descriptive writings usually describe some subject comparatively static in space and time: people, places, or objects that do not change much while they are being written about. The same format that is presented for the narrative can be used with the descriptive activity.

During descriptive writing, students occasionally wish to combine narrative approaches with descriptive ones. Questions

in a descriptive outline might be presented as: "What was the most important detail?" or "What happened first?" Some writers will eventually realize that narrations are simply a mode for description.

Advanced Composition Outlining

Expository writing is the most difficult form of composition. The term "expository," in the Individualized Language Arts program, denotes a type of writing whose main purpose is to express an idea about a topic and present a statement, comment, interpretation, or viewpoint. As in the case of narrative or descriptive composition, each of several widely accepted types of expository writing is outlined by specific procedures.

The most advanced form of expository writing is the Problem-Solution style. Problems used for compositions can be related to personal situations, school questions, or national issues. In attempting an outline for the Problem-Solution composition, students are made aware of the fact that four basic questions are necessary: 1) What is the problem? 2) What are the effects? 3) What are the causes? 4) What is the solution? These questions are aligned in the same previously described format.

Questions	Answers	Details
What is the problem?	---	---
What are the effects?	---	---
What are the causes?	---	---
What are the solutions?	---	---

The plan for the Problem-Solution paper is capable of being compressed into an outline resembling that used for other expository writing. This is accomplished by placing stress on two main questions: "What is the problem?" and "What is my solution?" Such a procedure is helpful in social studies, science, literature, or critique writing.

Some of the expository outlining procedures should be delayed until students are in the upper grades and have developed a value system. By working through the procedures for sentence synthesis, paragraph expansion, narrative and descriptive writing, students in the lower grades are given enough composition instruction and provided with adequate practice to enable them to produce well-written products. Expository writing is not recommended below the sixth grade; it is there used only on a limited basis.

Improving the Composition

The enrichment of sentences and paragraphs by the addition of a variety of adjectives, adverbs, attribute nouns, and appositives are a means used by Individualized Language Arts to polish and fine tune a composition. Various techniques are presented in the program to accomplish this purpose.

Expansion by modification is a procedure that begins with a short sentence devoid of modification and enlarging it. The basic sentence is expanded by adding descriptive words or phrases that answer the questions of "who," "where," "when," "how," or "why." With this method, a beginning sentence dealing with

carpenters ("Some hard working carpenters were here this week.") is expanded into a more descriptive form: "Every weekday between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m., young, strong, hard working carpenters from the Jones Construction Company are using hammers and nails to build an addition to the local family housing unit." Such expansion adds detail, description, and information to the simple statement.

Expansion by duplication is another improvement technique. This expansion form uses two models: 1) the appositive or 2) a process of eliminating repeated or unnecessary words. An original selection might read: "We use water for drinking. We use water for bathing. We use water for cooking." Writing is improved by incorporating the components into a concise element such as "We use water for drinking, cooking, and bathing." This process reduces duplication; therefore, the sentences produced are of greater density.

Slotting is a writing method with a variety of uses. Students choose appropriate words or synonyms to fill in slots related to the existing words in sentences. An example of the procedure is shown below:

The woman	buys	groceries	at the market.
housewife	selects	food	supermarket
lady	chooses	fruit	store
customer	notices	vegetables	Safeway
purchaser	purchases	meat	stand

By using the slotting procedure a variety of sentences with varied connotation and syntax are produced.

Slotting is also used to answer the various adverbial questions of "when," "where," "why," and "how" such as:

The visitors will arrive --- --- --- ---.

tomorrow
Sunday
on Thursday
quickly
at the airport
to meet their families

Adjectives are excellent candidates for slotting. Sentences are enriched and elongated by filling in the blanks at pertinent positions. Articles, qualifiers, or intensifying words and phrases are utilized to develop more interesting and descriptive sentences.

Articles	Qualifiers	Intensifiers	Adjectives
the	three	large	brave
a	rather	small	intrepid

The sentence produced could read, "The three, large, brave, and intrepid spacemen explored the surface of a rather small moon crater."

In the same manner, verbs and verb phrases can be slotted for either active or passive voice, mood, or tense. Additionally, slotting is employed to enrich sentences with subordination by supplying adjective, adverbial, and noun clauses. Prepositional phrases are used in the same manner as the clauses to add description and versatility to compositions. The learning of verbals is sometimes difficult for many upper-grade students. By slotting in each type of verbal, the concept of the verbal is taught,

necessary punctuation is noted, and sentences are developed with interesting additions.

Movability denotes rearrangement in compositions for emphasis or clarity. The students decide which placement not only reflects their meaning correctly but also produces intended emphasis and coherence with adjacent ideas. Such movability is illustrated in the following word movement.

"Yesterday, the classes visited the Art Museum.

The classes visited the Art Museum yesterday.

The Art Museum was visited by the classes yesterday.

Visiting the Art Museum was a class activity yesterday."

Not only are the words in sentences rearranged for variety, but the structure of paragraphs is addressed by the same technique. Sentences which are supportive to the topic or kernel sentence are arranged in order to present greater emphasis or more vivid description. Paragraphs in longer compositions are moved in the same manner. Sometimes, these changes enhance the uniqueness of the writing by breaking the static chronological order. Older students find this flexibility of style intriguing. Inverted sentences, questions, and the imperative sentence are developed by the employment of movability. The technique allows for the use of passive voice (the "was helped" in contrast to the "helped") in a variety of ways and adds elements of contrast to writing.

Embedding is a form of sentence reduction. Embedding a

sentence results in coordination and freshness in many students' work. Short related sentences are combined into a compound sentence or into a construction that has one of the original sentences as the independent clause and the other sentences as dependent clauses, prepositional phrases, or compound elements in subjects or verbs. A set of original class sentences are processed by the embedding procedures and the change from beginning composition to resulting construction is easily visible.

> Original sentences: "Our class saw an interesting TV program. It was about an espionage ring. They were captured by daring detectives."

The embedded sentence incorporates the meaning and elements of the original group into a smooth-flowing product.

> "Our class saw an interesting TV program about an espionage ring that was captured by some daring detectives."

The embedding procedure allows students to use their creative ability to combine various sentences and to produce logical constructions while keeping the original meaning of the information.

Conclusion

Individualized Language Arts is a program directed to the growth and enrichment of students' composition skills by providing teachers with instructional techniques based on developmental procedures. Through a series of strategies developed from the study of linguistics, basic sentences, paragraphs, and longer

written products are produced. Teachers are provided with a method that enables them to teach students how to write and how to include effective and creative thinking in their writing. As part of the elementary or secondary classrooms and in content area classes, the Individualized Language Arts program is directed to producing students with competent writing skills. These developed abilities add variety and spice to students' compositions. The program also supplies a workable system for students to logically organize their writings. Based on a total communication spiral, the instructional techniques incorporate skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Teachers are provided with simple but basic instructions to use in helping students with their writing assignments. The program requires no commercial materials and is usable as an addition to already existing Language Arts texts or English courses. Individual Language Arts is a practical, positive, and realistic way to answer teachers' concerns over how to improve the composition work of today's students.

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